

What is the Difference Between Marketing and Sales?

By Mark Smock

There seems to be a never ending argument among marketing and sales professionals as to what really is the difference between marketing and sales functions. More often than not, both business activity terms are used to describe any business activity that is involved in increasing revenues. For small businesses, with limited resources, there often is no practical difference in marketing and sales functions, all revenue generating activities are typically implemented by the same personnel.

As a company grows in revenues and number of personnel, it typically follows a logical business function progression of "specialization", a process where the lines between more generic, departmental descriptions and functions became much more definitive and associated functional responsibilities become much more focused. Marketing and sales functions are no exception.

Marketing and sales functions are diverse yet very interdependent. Typically "sales" cannot exceed revenue objectives without effective marketing planning and support, and "marketing" directives ultimately become useless without sales implementing the plan.

Like many complex business issues, it is sometimes easier to define something by what it's NOT as it is to define it by what it is. Let's take a closer look at marketing to better define what sales is not.

Simply defining "marketing" as the "Four P's", product, price, place and promotion, based on your Marketing 101 class in college is not practical in today's global markets. In a general sense, marketing is more theoretic than sales, focused on purchase causality and is more prescriptive in purpose than descriptive. Marketing involves micro and macro market analysis focused on strategic intentions where sales is driven more by tactical challenges and customer relations. Let's take a closer look at how marketing is truly different from sales:

Marketing responsibilities are distinct from sales in that marketing:

- Establishes and justifies the company's best competitive position within a market.
- Initially creates, helps sustain, and rigorously interprets customer relationships.
- Locates and profiles potential markets and key participants within.
- Generates quality sales leads.
- Develops effective selling tools.
- Formally analyzes and tracks competitor's business strategies and tactics.
- Defines, prioritizes and justifies new product or service improvements and developments.
- Promotes an explicit company product or service image.
- Facilitates information transfer from customers to the rest of the company.
- Simplifies the customer's product or service procurement process.

A full-time Marketing Manager would be responsible for the following tasks:

- **New Product Rollouts:** Strategy development, program incentives, timing and media coverage.
- **Agency Evaluation:** Selection and evaluation of outside marketing contractors.
- **Customer Database Management:** Software selection, training, maintenance of customer contact information.

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- **Market Research:** Market definition, prioritization, project management, data gathering.
- **Pricing Analysis:** Pricing as a marketing tool, initiate and analyze competitor's pricing practices.
- **Product Audits:** Establishment of a formal means to evaluate competitive offerings.
- **Public Relations:** Establishment, guidance and coordination of all areas of public relations.
- **Trade Shows:** Definition, participation, prioritization and audit for effectiveness of all trade shows.
- **Product Promotions:** Strategy formulation, program composition, premium definition, all media coverage.
- **Marketing Communications:** All printed / electronic communication: brochures, catalogs, price lists, case histories.
- **Media Selection:** Assist in selection and prioritization of all media options: print, broadcast, multimedia.
- **Internal Communications:** Establish and maintain all inter-company corporate communication means.
- **International Marketing:** Establish company presence in targeted international markets, audit for effectiveness.
- **Strategic Planning:** Offer strategic information and alternative insights to corporate management strategies.
- **Board Meeting Participation:** Communicate and reinforce the company marketing priorities, strategies and tactics.
- **Corporate Vision Statement:** Proliferate and reinforce the corporate vision throughout the organization.
- **Corporate Identity and Image:** Create, maintain, improve and "manage" all corporate images and symbols.

To a "pure" marketer, the marketing role in a company is not just a business function, but a business philosophy. An effective marketer truly believes "dominating" their target market is "owning" their market. The more a marketer can do to maintain market leadership the more effective they are perceived within the organization and within the industry.

As customer retention has become more of a business priority in our intensifying competitive markets, the marketing function has evolved from influencing potential customers to involving them the company's business planning and advancement. Effective marketing also has blurred the distinction between product and service and continues to apply more influence on the company's sales representation priorities.

In conclusion, marketing and sales functions are deeply rooted in each other's purpose and revenue growth intentions. There are few functional areas in business that relate more to each other. So the next time you hear someone say the word "sales", when the appropriate description would have been "marketing", or vice versa, think of this article and choose from any one of these documented business functions to make your point of distinction!

About the Author

Mark Smock is 30+ year veteran of the sales profession and president of www.business-buyer-directory.com, the FIRST international business buyer directory of its kind. Business Buyer Directory provides a non-traditional means for proactive business buyers to locate businesses for sale worldwide that meet their exact registered purchase criteria.

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